

UPDATE

Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

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OPEI CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY!



by Emilyn Brown

In the most traditional sense, the first anniversary of the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI) represents a milestone of achievement and the hope of continued success. In reviewing our first year of operations however, an additional cause for celebration comes from the significance of having advanced public awareness concerning the African Burial Ground and New York's African American history.

The concept of a public information office for the African Burial Ground began as the brainchild of OPEI Director, Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, who recently commented, "Public accessibility to the information and educational findings is far reaching. The history of the African Burial Ground is a neglected history, one where the circumstance of its existence was only known by a handful of New York historians and city planners, a relatively small number of individuals. The excavation of the African Burial Ground has brought to life a renewed interest in the life and death of African New Yorkers," she continued, "and the information that we have provided on the African Burial Ground is available, and has been received by people of all ages and races, locally, nationally and internationally."

Our fundamental goal of keeping the public abreast of the fast paced events associated with the African Burial Ground has come a long way, encompassing the controversial unearthing of the site in 1991, heated debates involving the fate of the human remains and artifacts recovered from the site and the impact of Congressional intervention that eventually paved the way for the cemetery's landmark status. Of course, no educational presentation would be considered complete without acknowledging the long months of collective struggle waged by concerned citizens, marked by prayer vigils, community sponsored events and culminating in the eventual transfer of nearly 400 human remains to Howard University.

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Twelve Voices and more!

"I've got my faith...that's all I need." — Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa!

Through it all, OPEI members have held the unique position of both educators and participants in the site's evolution.

Since OPEI's first open house, held in May of 1993, well over 6,000 people have taken advantage of lectures, lab tours, volunteer workshops, and an educator's symposium. Many others drop by for educational portfolios, press packages or photos. Tuesday P. Brooks, OPEI Office Manager, is quick to point out that attention has primarily been generated by word of mouth. "The thing that stands out most in our minds is that we've had to do very little to publicize our services up to this point and public interest is unceasing! Anyone who has sensitivity and understands the importance of history in general, has booked a slide presentation. Our audiences include college students, prisoners, the homeless, school groups, private firms and many city agencies."

Another point to consider is that the information received from community groups across the nation as increasingly made OPEI a clearing-house for cultural and historical data and part of an informal, ongoing network, "Although our goal is to educate the community, it's a fair exchange we learn of people, places and things that directly relate to our work," Ms. Brooks confirmed. It was in this way that OPEI learned the status of a number of early African cemeteries across the country, including Dallas, Texas; the University of Virginia at Charlottesville; Passaic and Newark, New Jersey and St. Louis, Missouri, and of the various groups engaged in preservation and/or restoration efforts.

OPEI's anniversary also happens to coincide with the early results of scientific research and conservation efforts, and we are pleased to present those findings in Update. **A Report On The Activities Of The African Burial Ground Project, Biological Anthropology Laboratory**, written by Mark E. Mack, Laboratory Director of the African Burial Ground Project at Howard University, is the first of anticipated status reports on the human remains transferred to the University. A second report detailing the progress of the recovered artifacts from the

Five Points archaeological site is the basis of the **Foley Square Laboratory Update**. Written by Jesse Ponz, a historical researcher at OPEI, the nature of conservation and the role artifacts play in revealing past history is detailed.

Although much has been accomplished over the past few years in relation to the African Burial Ground, there are still issues to be resolved and a host of new ideas to be implemented! For instance, current plans for appropriate memorialization of the site, already part of the ongoing agenda of monthly Federal Steering Committee meetings, are likely to gain momentum in the coming months. Also on tap is a current drive, spearheaded by Richard Brown, a concerned citizen and member of the Federal Steering Committee, to create an African Burial Ground commemorative stamp (see page 16 for details).

As for OPEI, we're thankful for the favorable responses we've received in answer to our query of how we're doing. Supplied by a cross section of visitor's to OPEI, the answers featured in this issue's Twelve Voices (plus!) have inspired us to expand our educational goals. Our latest effort involves creating a **Children's Corner** as a regular feature of Update. Aimed at developing cultural awareness among young New Yorkers, we encourage the submission of poetry, songs, art and stories that pertain to New York's African past. The prime beneficiaries of an inclusive history, the involvement of children in revisioning history to reflect all of its citizens is a critical step toward the enlightenment of future generations, undoubtedly the most tangible legacy of the African Burial Ground.

So here's hoping for your continued support and the success of OPEI educational directions; a pursuit aptly summed up by Ms. Brooks who states, "If we keep on the track that we're on, I think it's highly probable that we will eventually become an integral part of the public education system. When you think of how many school districts there are in New York, how many schools within each district and how many students within each school, we're just beginning to touch New York City!"

Report on the Activities of the African Burial Ground Project Biological Anthropology Laboratory

by Mark E. Mack, Laboratory Director

The Biological Anthropology Laboratory at Howard University has begun the initial phase of cleaning, reconstruction and recordation of the ancestral remains from the African Burial Ground. Much of the laboratory equipment needed to successfully conduct this aspect of our analysis and research has been ordered and received. These include such items as a microscope used for detailed observation of pathologies and digital calipers that are used for the numerous required measurements.

Since March 1994, with the hiring of one additional Osteological Technician and one Osteologist, we have increased the number of work stations from two to three. As of April, our team of researchers participating in the work at the lab reflects the multi-ethnic composition of our society. Of the 22 lab researchers 13 are African Americans, 5 are European Americans, 3 are African and 1 West Indian.

What does our work entail at the Biological Anthropology Laboratory? The initial phase of the project involves the cleaning, reconstruction and data collection of the ancestral remains as described below:

Cleaning - After researchers have familiarized themselves with a specific burial by reading field assessments, viewing burial photographs, etc., the skeletal material is removed from the storage trays. There are approximately two soil pedestals associated with each of the burials. These soil pedestals usually encase the delicate cranial bones (the skull) and innominate bones (the pelvic region). Because of the care and expertise

needed in cleaning, and afterward, reconstructing these remains, the Osteological Technicians perform these tasks with the help of Osteological Technician Assistants. Non-pedestal skeletal material and teeth are cleaned by the Osteological Technician Assistants.

The soil pedestals and other skeletal material are cleaned by dry brushing using artist's brushes, and gently removing the soil, using dental tools. In most cases, a 7.5% alcohol solution is applied to the soil by using pipettes. The alcohol loosens the hardened soil matrix without damaging any adjacent skeletal material. All soil removed from the pedestal remains and other skeletal material is screened for small artifacts, such as animal remains and small beads. These artifacts are then documented and curated for study.

Reconstruction - Most of the cleaned material consists of fragments which must be reconstructed to provide the most completely useful skeletal record possible. Osteological Technicians and Assistants will piece the bones together using a non-destructive, reversible adhesive, to the extent that the process will result in a skeletal element that can be accurately measured and diagnosed. The importance of this task cannot be overstated because various disease processes, such as tuberculosis and meningitis are exhibited differently in the skeletal material. As much of the skeletal material as possible must be cleaned and reconstructed in order to accurately diagnose these specific disease processes.

Data Collection - The initial phase of data collection consists of a variety of tasks. After cleaning and reconstruction of the remains, an inventory of the entire skeleton is completed. Measurements of long bones are taken to assess the stature (height) of each individual. This task is important because if a majority of individuals are of shorter than average height, this tells us that they faced conditions so severe that their normal growth was stunted.

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Sex and age determinations are made on each individual so that we can reconstruct the demographic profile of the population. It is important to know, from an anthropological perspective, whether people are dying at an early age, or if children are dying at a disproportionate rate; these determinations give us a picture of the proportion of men to women, the age structure of the community, and their health status.

Pathological diagnoses are considered to uncover what kind of life stresses our ancestors faced. These include the relative levels of infectious and nutritional diseases and trauma, among others evidenced in the skeletal material.

Finally, samples are taken from the skeletons and labeled for future chemical, histological and DNA analysis. These samples from archaeological skeletons are the equivalents of blood samples or biopsies from living patients.

As of April 10th we have completed the cleaning, reconstruction and data collection of the first 25 individuals excavated from the African Burial Ground. Some of the more interesting discoveries are described below:

Of the first 25 individuals, nine are children and the majority of those are under the age of six. This high number reflects the vulnerability of children when times are difficult. One must remember that when food is scarce or a population is faced with an epidemic such as smallpox or cholera, it is the children that suffer most.

Some of the diseases that we have found in the children's skeletons are spinal meningitis and possible hydrocephaly (burial 22) and rickets that afflicted a five year old child after he or she began walking (burial 17). In the adult skeletons one of the most striking examples of the results of the

stresses that these individuals faced can be found in their teeth. A majority of these adults had very poor dental health as indicated by the numerous cavities and abscesses, as well as enamel growth disruptions and dental crowding.

We have found a number of adults who have very robust muscle attachments on the long bones, a reflection of the heavy labor that many of these individuals had to perform.

There is also evidence of trauma (violence) in the skeletal remains of a young woman. Her right forearm was fractured, and inside the left rib cage was found a musket ball. Upon closer observation, we have determined that this unfortunate woman was shot in the back, probably causing her death.

Some of the most exciting discoveries involve what we have uncovered through cleaning, that gives insights into the cultural practices of our ancestors. These discoveries include finding a line of possible glass beads that encircled the neck of a woman (burial 12). These beads are similar to other beads found at the African Burial Ground. We have also found that two men had ceremonially filed teeth. The glass beads and the filed teeth are proof that African cultural traditions weren't eradicated by the Middle Passage!

In conclusion, we are actively conducting the initial phase of work, and many more interesting discoveries are before us. We, at the Biological Anthropology Laboratory are more than happy to extend invitations to those who are interested in viewing our progress to come to Howard University. We have previously conducted for prospective Howard

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SPRING EVENTS CALENDAR

Compiled by Ama Badu Boakyewa, Cynthia Copeland and Marie-Alice Devieux

FILM WATCH: SANKOFA is an epic story about the enslavement and struggle for freedom of millions of Africans. This critically acclaimed film by internationally renowned independent filmmaker, Haile Gerima, is a **MUST SEE!** But hurry. **Viewings are exclusive and INDEFINITE!** Sankofa is an Akan word with a powerful meaning: return to the past in order to go forward. Currently playing at the Cineplex Odeon, 23rd and 8th avenue. 212.989.0060.

Alone in a Crowd: Prints by African American Artists of the 1930s - 1940s. A touring exhibit of over 100 prints by 45 artists will be locally displayed at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven Connecticut **April 7-June 12.** The exhibit can also be viewed at The Philadelphia Museum of Art **October 9-December 4.**

APRIL 16-JUNE 30. South Africa/Black America Shared Victories/Common Struggles. The Schomburg presents a series of exhibits and cultural programs celebrating the first democratic elections in South Africa - South Africa: The Cordoned Heart - Sharing Our Lives and Mandela in New York City: A Photo Retrospective, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 515 Lenox Avenue (at 135th Street).

APRIL 24-MAY 22. The New York African Film Festival offers 12 classic and contemporary films which explore political struggle, sexuality, family life and culture. \$6. The Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway at Prospect Park. 718.638.5000, ext. 230.

MAY 17 and 24. Movie Showing: Mississippi Masala. Brooklyn Heights Library Branch, 2 and 6 pm (17th); Movie Discussion: 7 pm (24th) 718.722.3350

MAY 20 MEET-THE-AUTHOR. Award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson, author of "Hadr't Meant to Tell You This" and other titles for young adults, will discuss her latest title for young adults 12 years and up. NKIRU BOOKS, 76 St. Marks Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217 6-8pm

MAY 21

Small Business Seminar

Park Slope Brooklyn Library Branch, 1-3 pm
718.768.0593

Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground -- HAPPY ANNIVERSARY! OPEN HOUSE a one year celebration in honor of the official opening of the OPEI. Come take laboratory tours. Hear lectures, see slide presentations. Get informed on the preliminary lab findings of the analysis of the skeletal remains that were transferred to Howard University's Biological Anthropological Laboratory for study. 6 World Trade Center, U.S. Custom House, Room 239, 10 am - 5 pm.

Reclaim the Memories: Black History Tours, 12 Noon - 3 pm. Harlem Highlights Tour, traces the evolution of this historical community from Dutch farming days to becoming the African American metropolis of today. For more info call 914.966.1246. \$15 adults, \$5 children.

MAY 23

MEET-THE-AUTHOR. Lonnie Bonner, former reporter with the Oakland Tribune, is here to discuss her new book titled: "Good Hair: For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Weaves When the Chemicals Became Too Ruff" NKIRU BOOKS (See May 20th listing for address) 5 - 7 pm

May 26 Esteemed poetess Gwendolyn Brooks will be reading from her classic works at the Donnell Library, 20 West 53rd Street., 7pm. Free!

MAY 28 Parenting Workshop, "Peer Pressure," 2-3:30 pm. New Lots Brooklyn Library Branch, 718.649.3700.

Reclaim the Memories: Black History Tours 1-3 pm, African Burial Ground, highlights 19th century "Little Africa" where churches, schools and businesses served as fields for the seed of progressive African American thought. For more info call 914.966.1246. \$10 adults \$5 children.

Natural Living Seminar - Sponsored by Queen Afua and Heal Thyself. Dolly Madison Hotel, 22 East 38th Street, 2nd floor, NYC. \$50 advance sales. For more info please call 718.399.1903.

Spring Calendar cont. from page 5

MAY 28

African History is African Life! Raise Higher our Struggle for African Understanding! Lecture by Brother Leonard Jeffries, Chair of African Studies Department at City College. \$4, 4pm. Mt. Zion Church, 145th St. and Convent Ave., NYC 212.368.7353.

MAY 29

Tour - Greenwich Village

10,000 people are buried under Washington Square Park. Learn about the Potter's Field of Greenwich Village, the significance of street names and more! **Meet at the Washington Arch, 5th Avenue just below 8th Street at 12 noon.**

JUNE 2-5

The International Association of African American Music will hold its 1994 conference in Washington, DC. The four day celebration will be held during African American Music Month and will offer seminars on songwriting demos, contracts, and other music industry issues. 215.664.1677.

JUNE 4. 125th Anniversary Cultural Festival/ Identification Day! American Museum of Natural History. A day long celebration and festival of cultural diversity commemorating 125 years of expedition, exploration and discovery. The festival will comprise a number of events, featuring ongoing live performances of traditional music and dance, foods of the world, and demonstrations and workshops in the galleries, exhibition halls of the Museum, the Naturemax Theater, Hayden Planetarium, as well as on the grounds around the institution. In addition, bring along your mysterious treasure (artifact, bone or mineral) for identification by a museum scientist. Central Park West at 79th Street, NYC 212.769.5800.

JUNE 5. Reclaim the Memories: Black History Tours Black Women's History Tour, 1-3pm including highlights on the lives of Isabel Baumfree (Sojourner Truth) and Elizabeth Jennings, among others. For more info call 914.966.1246. \$10 adults \$5 children.

JUNE 11. African Spirituality: Tradition of Wholistic Health! Lecture presented by Sister Siti Opio, Naturopathic Physician, Midwife from the Sea Islands. \$4, 4 pm. Mt. Zion Church, 145th and Convent Ave., NYC 212.368.7353

JUNE 11 Reclaim the Memories: Black History Tours Harlem Highlights Tour, 12 noon - 3 pm. Traces the evolution of this historical community from Dutch farming days to becoming the African American metropolis of today. For more info call 914.966.1246. \$15 adults.

JUNE 18 African Reclamation: 5th Annual Tribute to our Ancestors of the Middle Passage. Coney Island Beach, Bay 16. Enter at Bay 13, Stillwell Ave. and Surf (behind Nathan's). **BRING FLOWERS AND FRUIT. 12 noon - 5 pm.**

Reclaim the memories: Black History Tours Wall Street Area Tour, 1-3 pm. This tour highlights New Amsterdam's Dutch, African and Native American relationships at the tip of Man-hattan Island, 1624-1664, and the changes that came with the British invasion in 1664. For more info call 914.966.1246. \$10 adults, \$5 children.

Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground. Educator's Symposium on the African Burial Ground. If you're an educator and you'd like to find out effective and innovative methods of integrating the historical findings and research on the African Burial Ground into your curriculum, please plan to attend. You must call to register. Pre-registration begins on May 16, 1994. 6 World Trade Center, Rm. 239, NYC 10-5 pm. 212.432.5707.

JUNE 25. African Collective Thought and Action - Foundation for Change! Lecture conducted by Brother Elder John H. Clarke, world renowned historian, educator and author. \$4, 4pm. Mt. Zion Church, 145th St. and Convent Ave., NYC 212.368.7353.

MAY 1994							JUNE 1994						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				1	2	3	4
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
29	30	31					26	27	28	29	30		

**The Good Works
Of African American Women
Part 2**

by Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson

The concerted and collective efforts of New York City's African American women during the 19th century, like the overall contributions of African descended people in early New York, has rarely been mentioned in the annals of New York popular history. The significant roles of 19th century African descended women as mothers, entrepreneurs, freedom fighters, educators and simply survivors, was not limited to a few, somewhat what well known women, such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Jennings, Catherine Ferguson and others. The collective endeavors of thousands of unknown women of African heritage has impacted the lives of many New Yorkers, especially impoverished African men, women and children who lived during this period.

With the goals of self help in mind, more than fifty (50) African associations and societies were formed in New York City during the 19th century for the moral, financial and spiritual "uplift" of the race (Perlman: JNH July 1971). The earliest associations were male organizations such as the African Mutual Relief Society which was organized in 1808 and incorporated in 1810. The Mutual Relief Society was the earliest and most prosperous type of mutual relief or relief organization. According to Leonard Curry, author of *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850*, its primary purpose was to "raise a fund to be appropriated exclusively towards the support of such of the members as shall by reason of sickness and infirmity be incapable of attending to their usual vocation or employment and also towards the relief of the widows and orphans of deceased members."

The associations and societies formed by women are historically described as female counterparts of the male organizations. The earliest recorded African womens' organizations in New York City was the African Dorcas Society established in 1827 by members of St. Phillips Church. The chief goal of the Society was to hold sewing groups to supply clothing for children attending the African Free Schools. In the April 1829 Annual Report of the African Dorcas Society it was reported that the Society had clothed 49 boys, and 25 girls during the school year and distributed 232 garments including hats and shoes. According to Charles Blockson, author of the *Underground Railroad*, the women of the Dorcas Society also raised funds and fed fugitive slaves.

Although little is known about most of the later female benevolent or beneficial societies, listed below are those societies known to have existed in New York City between 1827 and the mid 1840s:

- 1827 African Dorcas Society
- 1829 Female Assistant Benefit Society
- 1830 Female Literary Society
- 1834 Ladies Literary Society
- 1836 Female Wesleyan Anti-Slavery Society
- 1837 Abyssinian Daughters of Esther in New York (associated with Abyssinian Baptist Church)
- 1837 Female Mite Society
- 1837 Juvenile Daughters of Ruth
- 1838 Ladies of First Presbyterian Church

In addition to there being benevolent, and mutual or beneficial societies, the third type of New York Societies organized by Africans living in New York City was literary societies. During the early to mid 19th century, African-descended people were not allowed access to public libraries. To remedy this situation and make written materials

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FOLEY SQUARE UPDATE

by Jesse Ponz

One of the most exciting places in archaeology is the Foley Square Archaeological Laboratory. Located in the sub-basement of the Federal Customs House (6 World Trade Center), the lab is home to two of the country's most important site collections: the half-million, non-burial artifacts from fill at the Broadway Block, or African Burial Ground site, and the million or so artifacts recovered from the Courthouse Block or Five Points site.

Over the past 250 years, fifteen to twenty-five feet of fill was placed over the burying ground; strata by strata, or in layers. Within each strata is evidence of material culture from the past, such as pottery, animal bones, leather, etc. From that fill, non-burial artifacts were produced. Approximately 600 artifacts associated with the actual excavated burials were found within the graves. In other words, these were items placed with or within the strata of those who were buried there. These items are referred to as burial artifacts.

Because both sites are vital sources of information regarding life and death in 18th and 19th century New York, archaeological conservators and laboratory personnel are focusing their efforts on preserving and maintaining the artifact collections -- applying the methods and techniques of **conservation**. Often a long and painstaking process, conservation entails **identifying archaeological materials and the causes of their deterioration**, and then taking the appropriate steps toward stabilization (preventing or slowing the rate of deterioration). Conservation measures applied now will allow researchers to explore, for years to come, little known dimensions of our city's history, such as the burial customs of African New Yorkers. Regarding the Five Points site, research questions will focus on the means by which 19th century working people adapted to the hardships of urban living, including

low wages, cramped living spaces, and lack of sanitation.

The role of the conservator actually begins in the field as artifacts are unearthed. Prior to excavation, buried artifacts are subjected to a number of environmental stresses. Acids and salts, naturally occurring in many local soils, have a corrosive effect on metals and other substances. Microbes, including bacteria, attack organic matter, decomposing wood, paper and natural fibers into soil. Bones decompose into calcium and other constituent minerals. Moisture from rain and groundwater corrodes iron and copper, waterlogs wood causing the breakdown of its cellular structure, and hastens the onset of "glass disease," a condition wherein thin sheets of glass flake off the surface of glass objects. Eventually, however, artifacts reach a state of balance with their underground environment and the rate of deterioration slows down -- until they are unearthed. Once excavated, exposure to new conditions of moisture and temperature will once again set in motion the forces of deterioration.

After the stabilization of the African Burial Ground artifacts (see spring 1993 issue of Update [vol.1, no. 1]), the priority was to implement a strategy for stabilizing the Courthouse Block collection. The first step was to survey the collection by looking at a 10% sample to get an idea of the types of conservation problems at hand. As Conservator and lab director Gary McGowan explained, "We were looking for problems not recognized in the field and therefore not previously brought to our attention. We needed to see what materials were stable and what percentage of the collection needed immediate or long-term attention. Now we are embarked on what may be called **triage conservation**."

What McGowan means is that emergency measures are required for many classes of artifacts. "We're going bag by bag, pulling out what appear to be the most important artifacts with the biggest problems. One of the biggest problems has been the prevalence of bronze disease, a form of corrosion affecting such artifacts as copper-alloy buttons

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Foley Square Update cont. from page 8

and coins. To remedy this situation, specimens requiring treatment go through several steps, including hand cleaning and the application of a resinous substance to buffer them from such environmental factors as humidity.

Though the analysis phase of the project has yet to begin, McGowan is able to offer a few preliminary observations regarding the artifacts contained within what appears to have been an out-building, perhaps a privy or ice house, on the property of 108/110 Chatham Street (now Park Row) on the Courthouse Block. "All of the artifacts in the deposit," McGowan points out, "may have been dumped in one cleaning episode, since fragments of single glass and ceramic vessels are spread throughout the whole deposit."

As for dating the deposit, McGowan notes, "Though over 100 years of ceramics are represented in the deposit, the presence of at least two ceramic types -- semi-porcelain and white granite -- point to the 1860s, when these wares became available." McGowan also points to the presence of some items in the assemblage which were relatively costly, including imported Chinese porcelain and English Staffordshire pottery, a champagne bottle and a few jars that once contained fancy condiments. Though the presence of these items suggests that the occupants of 108/110 Chatham Street were well-to-do, another possibility is that they were poor working people who may have invested part of their earnings in good food and fine tableware.

Once the collections are preserved and the forces of deterioration slowed, typical lab procedures including cleaning, numbering, mending, identification, and counting will follow. Only after all the artifacts have been processed and analyzed and all the households compared, will we be able to answer questions and draw conclusions about the lifestyles of the Courthouse Block residents.

The Foley Square Archaeological Laboratory staff consists of Laboratory Director: Gary McGowan, Associate Conservator: Cheryl J. LaRoche, Laboratory Technicians: Michael Bonasera, Stephen Brighton, Larry Jepson, Claudia Milne, Doville Nelson.

A Conservator's Dream

Associate conservator Cheryl LaRoche, eyeball glued to a microscope, can barely be pulled from her work. "The Foley Square projects," she indicates, with the rare warmth of someone who enjoys her profession, "have been a conservator's dream. Virtually every conceivable type of material is represented in the collections."

Most of the artifacts reflect daily life in 19th century New York: ceramic dishes and bowls, glass bottles, architectural fixtures, toys and gaming pieces (including hand painted marbles and domino tiles), bits of fabric, and all manner of buttons, including a few from the Municipal Police Department of the military. Some artifacts will be quite useful in reconstructing little-known lifeways of the period. The bone and metal syringes, for example, may shed some light on health and hygiene practices. There are also a number of exotic materials, such as naturally occurring asbestos, a walrus-ivory handle fragment, and several varieties of coral. A large piece of star coral, indigenous to the Guinea Coast, the Caribbean, and Florida, was found in a coffin and a piece of staghorn coral was found in a grave shaft fill.

In addition to the rewards of information yielded by the conservator's efforts, LaRoche also appreciates the element of detection, what she terms "sleuthing," inherent in the work. One particularly puzzling item arrived in the form of a yellowish lump, the size of a child's pinky nail. Through careful comparative analysis LaRoche determined it was a seed pearl which, having shed its outer layer, had lost its luster. -- JP

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

by Cynthia Copeland

Most adults think about cemeteries as a final resting place for their dear and departed, while most children think about skeletons, graves and cemeteries as either fun or scary!

Think about it. A child or young adult's imagination soars in preparation of their costume design for Halloween night, as ghosts, skeletons and cemeteries are the major themes that come into play. And younger children tend to scare themselves out of their wits before going to sleep at night thinking about how the monsters, skeletons etc. are going to drag them off from their safe home during their slumber.

Until the recent excavation of the New York City landmark African Burial Ground, located in lower Manhattan, Halloween and dreams were perhaps the only times that New York City children really thought about cemeteries. But over the past two years and continuing, many children have been exposed to an important part of history.

In use during the 18th century, the African Burial Ground (formerly called the "Negroes Burying Ground") was used to separate black people from being buried with white people. The black people buried there were enslaved people, brought to the United States from countries in Africa and from the Caribbean Islands, against their will, to work and build the city. The African Burial Ground in New York City is believed to be the oldest cemetery for black people in North America.

But did you know that New York City is full of burial grounds? That's right. Many of the parks, playgrounds and places children go to visit were once cemeteries or potter's field. Potter's Field is a name for a public cemetery for paupers, criminals, unknown people and those whose families could not afford a plot in a private cemetery.

Such parks in New York City that have this dubious distinction include the famed Washington Square in Greenwich Village; Union Square located at 14th Street and Union Square; Madison Square, between 23rd and 26th Streets, bounded by Madison and

Broadway; and Bryant Park, that area that rests beneath the New York Public Library at 42nd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. The last Potter's Field created and used in Manhattan is located where the famous and elegant Waldorf Astoria Hotel stands today on 49th and 50th Streets, between Lexington and Park Avenues. And though not a park, a cemetery that stands today is the Jewish cemetery, located in Manhattan at New Bowery and Chatham Square. This is believed to be New York's oldest cemetery, housing a gravestone that dates back to 1682.

You can find lots of burial sites outside Manhattan too. For example, in Queens, LaGuardia Airport was built over three cemetery sites. At Queens College on Melbourne Avenue is the "Colored Cemetery" and on Northern Boulevard is a Native American burial site.

Heading towards Brooklyn? Near the intersection of DeKalb Avenue and Bedford lies a burial ground for Africans who were enslaved. Where the "terrific" A&S department store stands was the Breukelen (Dutch for Brooklyn) community cemetery, and in Prospect Park was the Society of Friends or the Quaker cemetery.

Van Cortlandt park, located in the Bronx, contains a "Negro Burial Ground." And a Native American cemetery was transformed into Pelham Bay Park.

You're just a Staten Island Ferry ride away from the New York Nursery and Child's Hospital cemetery located on Manor Road. Under the Fresh Kills landfill are two former burial sites. In 1895 near Billop Avenue, six skeletal remains of Native Americans were found on a small plot of land. Pushing up tees, instead of daisies, on the public golf course known as La Tourette, are the remains from the Bedell-Decker homestead.

When the descendants/friends bury their relatives/friends in a cemetery, they believe they are doing something good and sacred. They assume or believe that the space will be a final resting place that will never be disturbed again. Unfortunately, the truth is cemeteries are no more sacred than any other piece of land or real estate.

What's your opinion on burial grounds? Are they sacred or just another piece of land that will one day be built over with great big towers, skyscrapers and high-rise luxury apartment buildings? Write to us and let us know. Maybe we'll print your response in the Fall newsletter.

DIG IT!

The African Burial Ground is one of the most important New York City archaeological finds in recent times. To find things that are associated with this archaeological dig, search for the words below in the dig-for-words puzzle. Remember to look up and down, backwards and forward, sideways, across and like the letter X

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. landmark | 2. archaeology | 3. artifact |
| 4. burial | 5. cemetery | 6. anthropology |
| 7. skeletal remains | 8. laboratory | 9. ceramics |
| 10. conservator | 11. microscope | 12. trowel |
| 13. pottery | 14. map | 15. coffin |

S M P C O F F I N L E W O R T
K R A R C H A E O L O G Y S Z
E O M A R T X E A P A T I C O
L T S Y R E T E M E C G R I N
E A L A N D M A R K O R W M E
T V N R F L B N P L D O E A M
A R O T E A K J O B S U P R A
L E N I A B G P T W U N O E L
R S E F R O O D T R N D C C P
E N G A T R S H E L I L S O T
M O I C H A D U R C A D O B E
A C K T N T H I Y I M C R A T
I O N O T O K S R T A U C B A
N A L P E R J U L Y A R I M E
S E N O B Y B N A H T T M T O

People of the Underground by Sheri Bersch, 5th grade

*The People of the underground,
They lie with in peace.
They sleep, they rest they do what
the people of the gone do
They see us through the darkness
they see us through our feelings
they know they are in good hands.
They are people of the underground*

Good Works of African American Women cont. from page 11

available especially to Black families and children African Americans from well-to-do families began establishing literary societies.

The collective efforts of African American women to meet the everyday needs of their families were numerous and as with most poor people we can only speculate as to what most of those efforts consisted of. Most women of African descent living in 19th century post-emancipation (after July 4, 1827) New York City labored at domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and taking in laundry for more prosperous white families.

A smaller number of middle class Black women owned and operated boarding houses and inns. An even smaller number of Black women held professional positions such as teachers. One of the most outstanding and least documented activities of 100 women of African descent was the operation of a cooperative grocery. According to an advertisement in the *Colored American*, an early African American New York newspaper, the Female Trading Association's efforts were most admirable:

THE FEMALE TRADING ASSOCIATION

Continue their establishment, consisting of Dry Groceries of every description, at 157 Orange Street (near Grand Street) where they dispose of articles, cheap for cash. They solicit the patronage of their friends and the public. No pains will be spared to accommodate the public. Families will do well to call and examine for themselves. Flour, Indian meal, grits, hominy, rice, beans, peas, coffee, cocoa, teas, chocolate, hams, pork, beef, fish, shoulders, butter, lard, soap, starch, candles, cheese, oil, raisins, citron, spices of all descriptions, sugars, white and brown, brooms and brushes.

Colored American, June 7, 1841

conducted tours for prospective Howard students, as well as tours for archaeological and professional groups. We are currently conducting tours of up to 30 people on Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Please contact Mark E. Mack at (202) 806-5252 or 6523 to schedule an appointment.

"Past experience must be a guide for the future"



Recommended Reading on 19th century
New York AfricanAmerican Benevolent/
Beneficial and Literary Societies and
Organizations

Blockson, Charles. The Underground Railroad
Dramatic First-Hand Accounts to Freedom
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987

Curry, Leonard. "Fruits of Discrimination-Seeds
of Community: Associational Activities of Urban
Blacks" The Free Black In Urban America
1800-1850: The Shadow of The Dream
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981

Perlman, Daniel. "Organizations of the Free
Negro In New York City, 1800-1860" Journal
of Negro History, Vol. LV #3

Porter, Dorothy. "The Organized Educational
Activities of Negro Literary Societies 1828-1846"
Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 5, July 1936

WORKING GIRLS

"How many components make up anthropology?"..."What do Public Educators do?"..."How do archaeologists know how to recreate artifacts found in broken pieces?"..."What's conservation?" These and many more questions were posed to staff members of the OPEI by our young and curious guests on national "Take Our Daughters To Work Day" on Thursday, 28 April 1994. Our young women guests, ranging in age from 10-14 took an opportunity to see the OPEI in action and to think about possible future careers.

With a full schedule on their plates, the "daughters" viewed educational films and documentaries on the subject of the African Burial Ground, took walking tours which included a visit to the excavated site and a trip to the Foley Square Archaeological Lab. A brainstorming session with OPEI staff members and guests, led to the contribution of ideas on ways in which the Office can get more young people involved and interested in the African Burial Ground project. Among the many suggestions was that the Public Educators not be so BORING when they make slide presentations to school children! Thanks for the tip...we'll try to make the adjustment!

At the end of a very long and fast paced day, the "daughters" shared their thoughts and feelings about their career day experience. Before departing, each participant was presented with a program certificate and a bouquet of flowers.

By the way, there are four (4) components of anthropology: Archaeology, biomedical or physical anthropology, linguistic anthropology and socio/cultural anthropology. To find out the answers to the other questions, take yourself to work at the OPEI. -- CRC



TWELVE VOICES PLUS!

Compiled by Donna Cole, Steve Harper & Kmar Kashif

The Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) of the African Burial Ground will celebrate its first year anniversary in May 1994. During this year we have given 140 presentations and 45 laboratory tours on the African Burial Ground and the colonial African presence to more than 6,000 people. Can you share with us how OPEI has contributed to your understanding of New York African American history?

Gillian Bayne, Educator, EMC Enterprises & SUNY Educational Opportunity Center, Harlem, New York

The Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground has been instrumental in rewriting the history of colonial New York. It serves as a nexus to our past and validates a plethora of information that continues to embody the importance of the lives of colonial Black settlers in New York. My students and I have gained a wealth of knowledge and heart felt pride through the project's hard, untiring efforts. It has given us concrete evidence of what we have always known innately. We have contributed to and are, as a matter of fact, an integral, indelible part of American history.

John B. Harden, President & Sponsor of the 132nd Street Annual Block Party Association; Lieutenant, FDNY, Retired

The presentations were very enlightening. It not only presented a new "slice of life" for New York, but it also added tremendously to what I already learned from personal research on the topic. It is rewarding to know that blacks have been part of the development of this great city from its inception. This information has been deliberately

excluded from the basic educational curriculum and history of New York. The project underscores the need for more of the same. A program such as this is very much needed and should be mandatory in all schools throughout the Union. It is an important part of history which has been omitted and needs to be reinserted.

**Dorothy Johnson, Activities Coordinator
Frederick Douglass Childrens' Center, N.Y.**

I thought it was an excellent presentation.

I thought that the children were very much a part of what was going on. The presentation opened up a lot of questions about the African Burial Ground. Many of the children did not know where it was or what it was about. They learned a lot and became very curious about the remains and the artifacts. Also, many of them have asked me questions about the African Burial Ground since the presentations...I have asked the children to speak with their parents to encourage them to visit the Foley Square Laboratory and the OPEI. This is the kind of project we would like to support again and again, each year as new groups enter our program.

**Jerrel Fair, Deputy Director
Forbells Mens Shelter, Brooklyn, N.Y.**

I believe that the presentations were able to give an understanding of the black man in pre-revolutionary America. The fact that blacks participated in the freedom fights in America is quite evident. These are facts which are not readily available to everyone, especially the school children of America. There is a great need for this type of information to be shared so that ethnic pride can be developed. Facts which were uncovered by your organization presents evidence of the need for further study of the Black man and woman fighting for freedom in this country. The OPEI has taught us that from the beginning (including the Revolutionary War) to the present, Black people have supported America's fight for freedom here and abroad. To have received this information ,

continued on page 14

Twelve Voices cont. from page 13

February, Black History Month was very good. It was an enlightening presentation for the men at the Forbells Mens Shelter. Programs of this sort are welcomed at this facility at any time because of its overall significance.

**Shakuwra Muhammad,
ACBAW Center for the Arts,
Mount Vernon, New York**

The OPEI conducted three presentations for the ACBAW Center for the Arts. The children ranged in age from Kindergarten through high school level. All the children...were very interested in finding out that their ancestors were discovered here. They expressed a lot of concern as to what would happen to the remains. They were comforted in knowing that the remains would be reinterred, "laid back to rest". The journey for our history has been a long process, but our ancestors are not allow the journey to end. Our children will need continued education for such information in order to go forward. It is with deep appreciation that is information was shared and will continue to be researched in the coming years.

Denise Gunter, Teacher P.S. 201, Manhattan

Just having the opportunity to visit and view the slides along with my class was very helpful and useful for my Social Studies curriculum. Also, the lab was interesting, providing viewing of actual artifacts. This is the only place, that I know of, where this information is centralized, providing me with the ability to share this information. We all, my class and I, were very interested.

Geraldine Casey, Professor, John Jay College

...The high quality of your presentation demonstrates the African Burial Ground project's success in accomplishing its goals of public education and interpretation...your professionalism was very inspiring to the students...students commented on your wealth of knowledge and your command of a broad range of cultural history...

**Lisa Best, Schuyler Allen & Alice Messinger
Teachers, Manhattan Country School**

...Both [the presentation and lab tour] were an exciting and wonderful opportunity for the 9 and 10 year old's to learn about African American history and the history of our city. The value of what you have given us is very significant and will contribute greatly to their understanding of the American experience...

**Sheri Bersch, 5th grade student,
Manhattan Country School**

I liked learning about the African Burial site. I enjoyed writing the poem for "The People of the Gone." The whole idea just came to me and inspired me to do it.

[ed. note: see Children's Corner]

**Dr. Arnold Sparr, History Department
St. Francis College**

I wish to officially thank you and your office for educating my urban history students here at St. Francis on the African Burial Ground project. Many had never heard of the project until today. Now I've got about ten students who want to become anthropologists...Keep up the good work; it is an important chapter in this city's history.

Mr. Richard Shaw, Concerned Citizen

I can say first of all that no matter what may have been written in history books about African Americans in New York, which was absolutely nothing when I was growing up, nothing compares to seeing an actual grave site and seeing the real remains of people that were here so long ago and who experienced so much and of whom so little had been written.

It puts so many things in a different perspective to know that African Americans at one time owned some of the most valuable real estate in New York and to consider where their descendants would be know if it has been passed down to the present day the way the wealth of many of the richest families of America today was passed down. One has to wonder what the circumstances of so many

continued on page 15

Twelve Voices cont. from page 14

African American descendants would be now if it had been passed down to the present day the way the wealth of many of the richest families of America today was passed down. One has to wonder what the circumstances of so many African American families would be like if their ancestors had been allowed to practice the trades they knew so well. I imagine there would have been an awful lot of very successful African American families and the trades would have been passed on from generation to generation enabling some to go much further.

It's enlightening to know the part African Americans played in the building of New York City, a place where it can be very difficult to get into a trade union and work on construction contracts because "there aren't enough qualified Blacks." Imagine if all those people had been paid for their labors how well established so many Black families would be today..."

Janet Koral, Teacher, Brooklyn Adult Learning Center

I never knew there was an African Burial Ground or African community in New York before the presentation of by the OPEI. The lecture and slide presentation instilled a great deal of pride in me and my students. The public educators were well versed on the African Burial Ground and you could sense their commitment to the African Burial Ground Project.

Linda Smith, Bill Stokes, employees, Defense Logistics Agency

The presentation is significant in that it is not only historical but anthropological. The beauty of the presentation is that it educates adults as well as high school and junior high school students. Moreover, for New York City students it is the only African American history that some of them will see while in high school. Thus, the latter impact is an asset. Its value and potential can be greatly enhanced if it were delivered to at least two high schools and one junior high school per week. The presenters are jewels.

David Martin, Co-Chairman of Mentoring & Tutoring, Concerned Black Men, Inc.

Ralph Bunche Elementary School, Harlem, NY
We would like to thank the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) of the African Burial Ground for opening both their doors, and the minds of the 4th and 5th grade classes who viewed both the slide presentation and went on the laboratory tour.

This African American historical discovery, as presented by the OPEI, establishes a new foundation for New York's children and adults. OPEI has turned this discovery into a living and breathing exhibit, which engulfs all who are exposed to it.

The burial ground somehow makes our existence "more real," it breathes life into our history, and gives our children much more than a glossed over few pages of an American history book. This knowledge of our past will strengthen us for tomorrow.

OPEI's burial ground presentation is an emotional experience which continues to grow. This is something no American, especially African Americans, should let pass them by.

Are You on Our Mailing List?

If you would like to receive our quarterly newsletter and other information, please complete and return this coupon by mail or fax to:

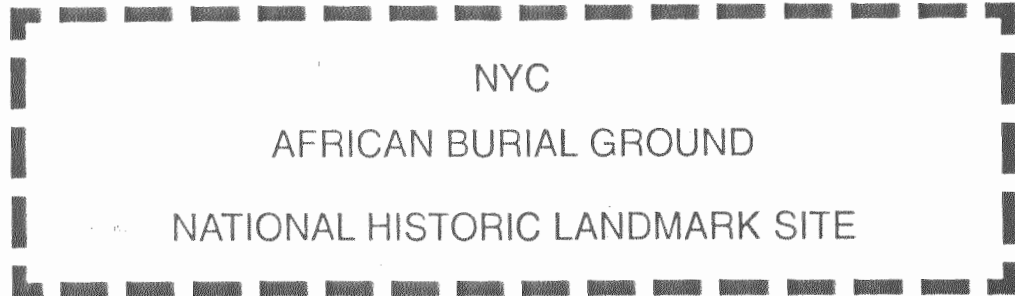
**OPEI-African Burial Ground Project
6 World Trade Center, Room 239
New York, NY 10048. Fax to 212-432-5920**

OPEI Mailing List

Name _____

Address _____

PETITION FOR AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND COMMEMORATIVE STAMP STATUS



We are committed to the national and international recognition and preservation of the heritage of Africans and their descendants in the Americas. We are launching a national campaign to have the U.S. Postal Service issue an African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp. Our goal is to collect 1,000,000 (one million) signatures to submit to the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC). Your assistance and participation in the collection of signatures is needed and appreciated in this historic endeavor.

Please return petitions as soon as possible to the address below.

All petitions must be returned by December 14, 1994:

Office of Public Education & Interpretation
of the African Burial Ground (OPEI)
6 World Trade Center
U.S. Custom House, Room 239
New York, N.Y. 10048

Telephone 212 432-5707 Fax & Hotline 212 432-5707

NAME

(Please print clearly)

COMPLETE ADDRESS

Number, Street, Apt.

City,

State

Zip
